

# PRESERVING WILDERNESS IN CITIES

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## **Abstract**

Urbanization is the rapidly changing face of civilizations in the new and old world alike. Due to lack of awareness, understanding, planning and proper management urban development has become synonyms with environmental decline. The paper deals with the concept of coexistence with nature in the changing urban habitats, which is a dream in modern times. Greening of cities is an idea widely appreciated by city planners and public alike. However, the greening of cities can be more meaningful if we protect, preserve and conserve the natural habitats in and around the urban fringes rather than creating artificial gardens, aqua parks, and plantations of exotic species.

A large number small and fragmented vital wilderness habitats such as woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, hills are rapidly disappearing in the process of urban development even before realizing their uniqueness and importance for city dwellers. Preserving the wilderness areas is not only cost effective and practical but is 'wise' as it retains the original characteristic of the township by nurturing its cultural and natural heritage. The concepts like 'urban wilderness' and 'rewilding' of natural habits on the fringes of towns and cities is now becoming increasingly popular with planners, designers, engineers, ecologists and conservationist in Europe and north America. Some of these ideas are discussed in the paper with context to the rapid urban development in Maharashtra.

Case studies reveal that it is possible to protect small fragmented natural habitats, cost effectively and without damaging their character and at the same time accommodating healthy urban eco-development. The wilderness areas have ecological, biodiversity, recreation, educational, esthetic, religious and natural heritage values. There is still potential for protecting and conserving the increasingly threatened wilderness areas in and around the growing towns and cities to ensure better quality of urban life which is healthy, peaceful and beautiful. This can be achieved by spreading awareness about values of wilderness, changing attitudes of city planners and developers and by involving locals in protecting their own natural environment for better future.

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